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ABSTRACT

This report identifies problems in planning for school construction by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and discusses how the Board of Education can better administer its building modernization and renovation program. The aim of the study was to find out if DCPS' capital improvement planning system was providing essential data to the Board of Education to enable it to effectively plan for designing, constructing, or modernizing school buildings; and if the elementary school construction projects proposed or in progress were still warranted, especially since DCPS has been experiencing a steady decline in its elementary school enrollment. DCPS' capital improvement planning and monitoring processes were reviewed, including its policies for constructing new facilities and replacing or modernizing existing school buildings. The need for capital improvement projects in progress or proposed for funding during fiscal years 1976 through 1981 were examined. The report, after analyzing spaces available in nearby schools, advised that the Board of Education could save about $7.7 million of capital improvement funds by canceling its plans to build a replacement school and could improve the administration of the capital improvement program through better planning for the design, construction, or modernization of school buildings. (Author/MLF)

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ED165276

UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Excess Classroom Space-- A Case For Better Planning

District of Columbia Public Schools

The Board of Education could

--save about $7.7 million of capital improvement funds by canceling its plans to build a replacement school and

--improve the administration of the capital improvement program through better planning for the design, construction, or modernization of school buildings.

EA 011 192

GGD-76-73

SEPTEMBER 30, 1977

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION

B-118638

The Honorable Therman E. Evans
President, Board of Education
of the District of Columbia
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Dr. Evans:

This report identifies problems in planning for school construction by the District of Columbia Public Schools and discusses how the Board of Education can better administer its building modernization and renovation program.

Section 736(b)(3) of the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act of 1973 requires the Mayor, within 90 days after receiving our report, to state in writing to the District Council, with a copy to the Congress, what has been done to comply with the recommendations made in the report. Section 442(a)(5) of the same act requires the Mayor to set forth in the District of Columbia's annual budget request to the Congress the status of efforts to comply with such recommendations.

Copies of this report are being sent to the chairmen of interested congressional committees; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Mayor and members of the Council of the District of Columbia; and the Superintendent of Schools.

Sincerely yours,

for Victor L. Lowe
Director

GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REPORT TO THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

EXCESS CLASSROOM SPACE--A CASE FOR BETTER PLANNING District of Columbia Public Schools

D I G E S T

Through better planning, the Board of Education could improve the administration of its capital improvement program to more effectively evaluate when, where, and how many schools are needed in the District's public school system.

To obtain better planning the Board of Education should:

--Implement a facilities planning system that provides for the accumulation and reporting of essential data to assist in evaluating its school building needs. (See app. V.)

--Revise its planning policy to consider the schools' available pupil capacity in adjacent planning areas rather than only that of a specified area in determining its space needs.

--Codify its policy statements on capital improvements and formally submit them to the Superintendent of Schools.

--Develop and adopt a plan and timetable for implementing the planning system.

--Cancel its plans to build the Perry-Simmons replacement school.

The Mayor said our report would be useful to the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the Board of Education in their planning efforts and would be a useful tool in the city's efforts to make the most intelligent use of available space. He said that the report's results have already been useful.

Tear Sheet. Upon removal, the report cover date should be noted hereon.

GGD-76-73

The Board of Education did not comment specifically on GAO's recommendations. The Board stated that recent testimony on its capital budget (fiscal years 1976 and 1977) before the Subcommittee on District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Appropriations, covered most of the material in the report. The testimony shows that "The Board clearly recognizes the critical need for facilities planning, and is making every effort to assign the highest priority to this function."

Actions are being taken to improve school facilities planning, but no specific plan had been developed nor had a timetable been set for completing and implementing the necessary planning processes. This should be done.

The Board said that the Congress approved the Perry-Simmons replacement school. The reports of the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations showed that the Board's request for funds in fiscal year 1976 to complete the design and start construction was deleted from the budget. The Board still plans, however, to build the replacement school which GAO said was not needed. A request for $7.7 million was made in the Board's fiscal year 1978 capital budget.

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

The District of Columbia Public Schools manages and operates about 200 schools with a staff of about 12,100. Operating costs in fiscal year 1977 will be about $245 million. Student enrollment, down for the sixth straight year, was 127,000 in school year 1976-77. About $74 million was allotted for operating 132 elementary schools in school year 1976-77.

SHOULD THE PERRY-SIMMONS REPLACEMENT SCHOOL BE BUILT?

GAO believes that the need for the Perry-Simmons replacement elementary school has not been satisfactorily justified. There are 11 elementary schools in the same planning area as the proposed replacement school. For

school year 1976-77 these 11 schools had over 1,900 excess spaces. By not proceeding with the replacement school, DCPS could cut its capital improvement expenditures by about $7.7 million and reduce its annual operating costs by about $44,000. (See ch. 2.)

EXCESS CLASSROOM SPACE

DCPS' January 1977 enrollment forecasts showed there would be about 19,000 excess seats in elementary schools in school year 1976-77. Declining enrollments and added classrooms will create over 28,000 excess seats by school year 1980-81. This surplus equals about 1,170 classrooms or 47 schools of 600 students each. DCPS' standard for elementary schools is 500-600 pupil spaces. Many of the schools with excess capacity are within blocks of each other. (See ch. 3.)

WHAT CAUSED THIS TO HAPPEN?

In 1961 DCPS started an extensive building program to eliminate crowding, replace inadequate school structures, and provide space to permit decreasing the class sizes from 30 to 24 pupils.

Since fiscal year 1961 DCPS has added about 34,000 pupil spaces to the elementary school system and expects to have another 2,000 spaces ready for use by school year 1980-81. Elementary school enrollment, which was 77,601 in school year 1960-61, peaked at 94,267 by 1967-68 but declined by school year 1976-77 to 68,501, a decrease of 25,766.

DCPS did not have an effective facilities planning system to help it during this building program. A system requiring the systematic accumulation and reporting of data, such as analyses of existing and future pupil enrollments and building capacities, could have helped the Board reduce or avoid the accumulation of excess spaces.

Elementary school capital improvement projects were planned, designed, and constructed to meet the needs of a neighborhood or school planning

area without considering the availability of spaces existing elsewhere in the school system. (See pp. 17 and 18.)

Changing conditions can alter the need for or priority of a planned project, but DCPS management did not routinely evaluate the continued need for projects. (See pp. 18 and 19.)

The Superintendent of Schools recognized in May 1974 that DCPS needed to develop a systematic approach for designing, constructing, and using school buildings. Although DCPS had developed criteria for a facilities planning process, it did not set up a facilities planning group until April 1976.

Funds to establish a facilities planning process were requested for fiscal years 1975 and 1976. For fiscal year 1975, the Senate Committee on Appropriations suggested that funds be reprogramed for this purpose. The request was not approved for 1976, but the Committee directed that this activity, as it related to school closings, be financed with available funds.

DOES DCPS STILL NEED A FACILITIES PLANNING SYSTEM?

Yes. DCPS plans to start a building modernization and renovation program, and for the next 6 years--1978 through 1983--it plans to spend about $102 million on this program. Because enrollments are expected to continue to decline for the next few years, DCPS faces a critical problem of making optimum use of school buildings and determining which schools should be renovated.

Until a facilities planning system is implemented to help the Board decide the proper course of action, the Board cannot effectively plan and monitor the modernization program. For example, information will be needed to help decide:

1. How to use excess space.

   --Should schools be closed or converted for other use?

2. How to plan for school modernization.

   --What schools most need modernizing so that priorities can be established to get the job done at the least cost?

   --What changes must be made to school buildings to accommodate new educational programs?

Tear Sheet

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ABBREVIATIONS

CIP-TAC	Capital Improvements Program--Technical Advisory Committee
DCPS	District of Columbia Public Schools
GAO	General Accounting Office
K	kindergarten
PK	prekindergarten

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In August 1974 the Senate Committee on Appropriations reported that an extensive evaluation of the capital planning requirements of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) was needed to help justify additional capital projects for the school system. The Committee stated that initial funding requested for new school projects had been denied because of the need for further planning for capital improvements funding for public schools in the District.

We wanted to find out if DCPS' capital improvement planning system was providing essential data to the Board of Education to enable it to effectively plan for designing, constructing, or modernizing school buildings. Also, we wanted to find out if the elementary school construction projects proposed or in progress were still warranted, especially since DCPS had been experiencing a steady decline in its elementary school enrollment.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

We reviewed DCPS' capital improvement planning and monitoring processes, including its policies for constructing new facilities and replacing or modernizing existing school buildings. Also, we examined the need for capital improvement projects in progress or proposed for funding during fiscal years 1976 through 1981. Although we concentrated on the elementary school capital improvement program, our findings and recommendations could apply to DCPS' capital improvement program for secondary schools because DCPS uses the same procedures for determining the need for such schools.

ORGANIZATIONAL DATA

DCPS operated a network of 199 schools in 1976-77. This included 132 elementary schools, 42 junior and senior highs, and 25 vocational or special education schools. For that school year, the system served about 127,000 elementary and secondary school pupils.

DCPS' operations are financed mostly by annual appropriations of District of Columbia revenues and by a direct Federal payment, revenue sharing funds, and grants from Federal agencies. District and Federal funds received totaled about $236 million in fiscal year 1976 and about $245 million (excluding funds received for pay raises) in fiscal year 1977. DCPS had about 12,100 employees in fiscal year 1977.

An 11-member elected Board of Education is responsible for policy decisions, long-range planning, and the development and implementation of public school programs in the District of Columbia. A Board-appointed Superintendent administers the school system.

In enacting the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act (Public Law 93-198), the Congress specified that the Mayor and City Council may establish the maximum amount of funds allocated to the Board of Education. But, it may not specify the purposes for which such funds may be spent or the amount of such funds which may be spent for the various programs under the Board's jurisdiction. The Board is vested with final authority in determining what capital improvement projects should be included in its capital outlay budget.

Although the Board of Education determines school facility needs, the District's Department of General Services contracts for the construction and/or modernization of buildings, including design and engineering work, and administers the contracts for the Board.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

DCPS had been engaged in a catchup construction program designed to eliminate crowding, replace inadequate school structures, and decrease the class size from 30 to 24 pupils. Since fiscal year 1961, DCPS initiated over 100 capital improvement projects. The Congress authorized the District to borrow about $357 million for these projects through fiscal year 1977. DCPS reprogramed an additional $500,000.

These projects will add or replace about 23,000 pupil spaces in the secondary system and add over 36,000 permanent spaces to the elementary school system. Of these projects, 81 were completed as of fiscal year 1976. The remaining projects are scheduled to be completed by October 1982.

According to the District Government's 1978-83 capital improvement program, DCPS will move from constructing schools (adding or replacing seating capacity) to updating or modernizing its schools. During the 6-year period, DCPS plans to start 18 projects costing an estimated $83 million. According to the program, DCPS also plans to request $33 million for four projects previously authorized. The program calls for modernizing 20 elementary, secondary, and vocational schools at a cost of $102 million. Also included in the plans is the development of a $7 million prevocational center

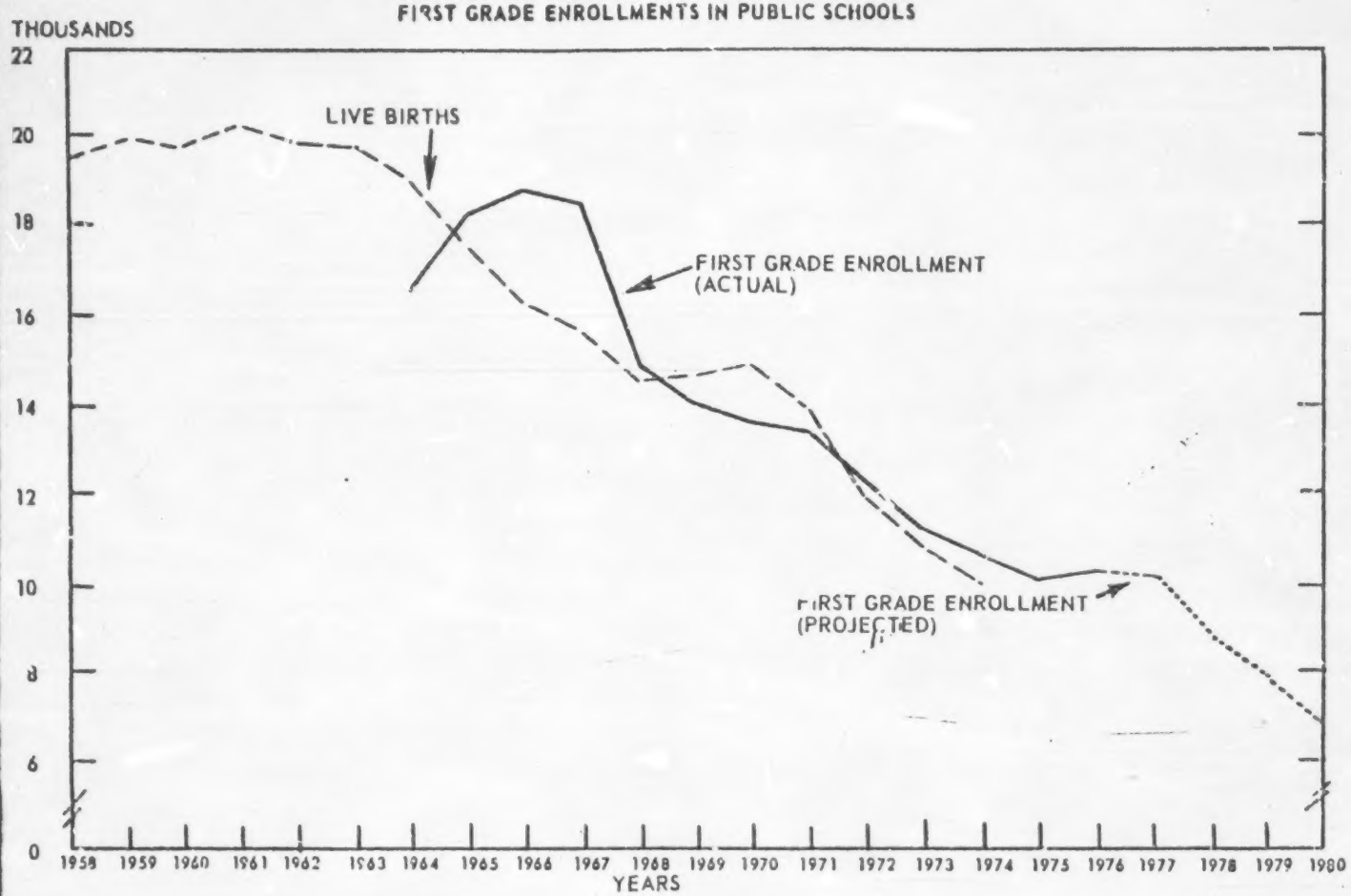
for handicapped secondary school level students and construction of a new elementary school with a pupil seating capacity of 700 spaces also at a cost of $7 million. These two projects are proposed for funding in fiscal years 1979 and 1981. DCPS' standard for new elementary schools is 500 to 600 pupil spaces.

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

Elementary school enrollment in the District's public schools has been decreasing at an average of 2,863 pupils a year between school years 1967-68 and 1976-77. During that 9-year period the student population dropped from 94,267 to 68,501. DCPS' projections made in January 1977 show that the prekindergarten through sixth grade (PK-6) membership will continue its downward spiral for the next 4 years, hitting a 29-year low of 59,500 students in school year 1980-81. (See chart on p. 11.)

DCPS attributes the sharp decline to the (1) migration of families with school age children to suburban communities, (2) declining number of births in the District of Columbia, and (3) drop in student entries from outside the District. The following chart shows the downward trend in births since 1961 and its corresponding effect on first grade enrollment.

COMPARISON OF LIVE BIRTHS IN THE DISTRICT WITH
FIRST GRADE ENROLLMENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS



CHAPTER 2

IS THERE A NEED TO CONSTRUCT ANOTHER PROPOSED REPLACEMENT SCHOOL?

The Board of Education's policy is that:

> " * * * when a sizeable seat shortage exists in an area that possesses an old unsatisfactory school plant, a replacement which will provide the needed seats or a portion thereof is warranted. A facility in this category must not be capable of economical renovation in addition to lacking the facilities to support our modern school program. If additional seats are still needed these are to be provided in a new structure." (Underscoring supplied.)

DCPS requested $7.7 million in its fiscal year 1978 capital budget for a replacement school costing $8.2 million. The need for this school has changed since work on the project first started and current justifications for the project neither support a need nor meet Board policy.

REPLACEMENT OF THE PERRY AND THE SIMMONS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The Perry and the Simmons Elementary Schools were built in 1890 and 1896, respectively. The Perry school was closed in 1973. Both buildings will be razed when a replacement school is constructed. The schools are in DCPS planning area 12. (See map, p. 7.)

A single replacement for the two schools is being designed. The total estimated cost is about $8.2 million, and the school will have a seating capacity of 641. DCPS expects that the design will be completed in August 1977 and the school ready for use in school year 1979-80.

The replacement school was initially included in the fiscal year 1973 budget. DCPS justified the need for the school on the basis that by school year 1977-78 the projected (PK-6) pupil enrollment in planning area 12 would increase by 1,562 to a total of 7,465. According to the budget request, the fiscal year 1973 capacity of the 12 schools in planning area 12 was 6,161; enrollment was estimated at 5,903. The capacity of the replacement school was set at 1,124.

DCPS, in its fiscal year 1974 budget request, changed its basis for justifying the need for the replacement school. The estimated pupil enrollment of 5,903 for planning area 12 was 550 students lower than expected, indicating that the 1973 projection would not materialize. DCPS then justified the replacement school on the basis of increasing pupil enrollment for only a segment of planning area 12 (urban renewal area NW #1). The capacity of existing schools in NW #1 was 1,592.

DCPS estimated that the PK-6 enrollment for NW #1 would increase from 1,276 pupils in school year 1973-74 to 1,849 pupils in school year 1978-79--an increase of 573 pupils. (This projection includes students who live outside the boundaries of NW #1.) To accommodate the projected increase, DCPS planned to add 396 spaces to one of the existing schools in NW #1 and decrease the capacity of the other two schools by building a smaller replacement school with a capacity of 830. The net effect of these changes was to have a total seating capacity of 1,854 to meet the projected student enrollment of 1,849 in school year 1978-79.

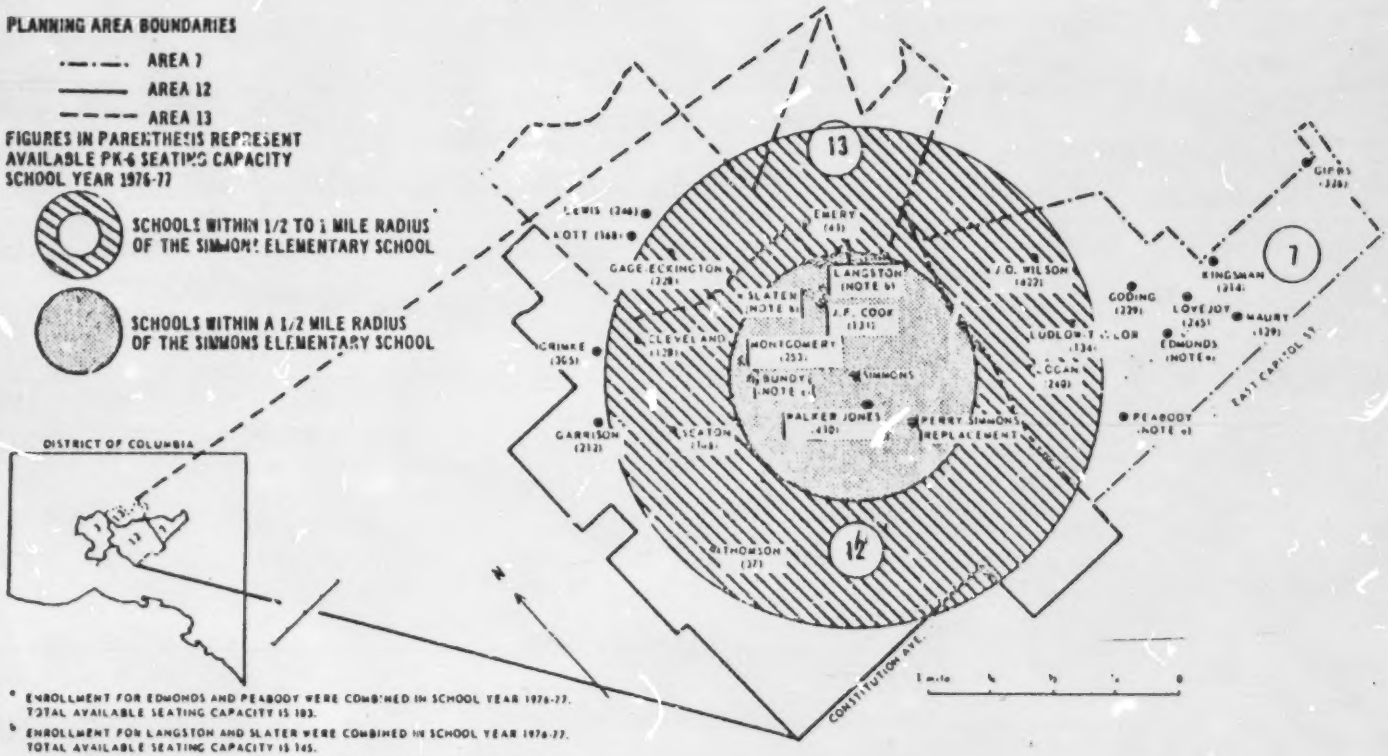
The House and Senate Committee reports on Public Law 93-91 indicate that the District was authorized to borrow $484,000 to start work on the replacement school. Design of the facility was started in September 1974. The capacity of the replacement school was adjusted from 830 to 738 (later reduced to 641) pupil spaces when DCPS changed from a half-day to an all-day prekindergarten and kindergarten program.

Considering only the estimated PK-6 enrollment and school capacity for NW #1, a replacement school would be needed. As explained below and illustrated in appendix IV, however, there are excess spaces in nearby schools outside the boundaries of NW #1 that, if used, would eliminate the need for the replacement school.

The Board of Education has an unwritten policy that children should not have to walk farther than 1 mile to attend school. The map on page 7 shows the elementary schools close to the Simmons school and the excess seating capacity based on the 1976-77 PK-6 enrollment and school capacity data available at the time of the review.

Thirteen elementary schools within a 1-mile radius of the Simmons school have sufficient total excess capacity--2,335--to handle the enrollment of the replacement school. Five of these schools are within a 1/2-mile radius. Five of the elementary schools, within 1 mile of the existing

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS SERVING PLANNING AREAS 7, 12, & 13



[a] ENROLLMENT FOR EDMONDS AND PEABODY WERE COMBINED IN SCHOOL YEAR 1976-77. TOTAL AVAILABLE SEATING CAPACITY IS 193.

[b] ENROLLMENT FOR LANGSTON AND SLATER WERE COMBINED IN SCHOOL YEAR 1976-77. TOTAL AVAILABLE SEATING CAPACITY IS 145.

[c] BUNDY WAS CONVERTED TO A SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITY IN SEPTEMBER 1976 AND HAS AN ENROLLMENT OF 73. THE CAPACITY IS 424.

Simmons school had 1,385 PK-6 seats available in school year 1976-77. Except for the Montgomery school constructed in 1949 (a new addition opened in September 1976) and the Walker-Jones school constructed in 1950 (added to in 1974), the other schools were constructed after 1960. DCPS does not plan to close any of these schools. The excess pupil spaces in these schools should be more than sufficient to handle the enrollment of the Simmons school; in school year 1976-77 the actual PK-6 enrollment was 489.

Considering only the available space in schools in planning area 12 (NW #1 is located in this area), further doubt exists as to the need to build the replacement school. DCPS' justifications were based on PK-6 enrollments. Because data was not available, the following analysis does not include prekindergarten enrollment. In planning area 12, however, the prekindergarten enrollment was 191 in school year 1976-77 and thus would not affect the conclusions reached. Capacity was computed using information available at the time of the review. The data showed:

--The kindergarten through sixth grade (K-6) enrollment in planning area 12 for school year 1976-77 was 4,045. The seating capacity of the 11 elementary schools in this area was 5,998, or an excess of 1,953 pupil spaces.

--The K-6 enrollment for planning area 12 was expected to increase to 4,665 by school year 1978-79. Even though the capacity of the area schools would be reduced to 5,747 pupil spaces if the replacement school were built, there would be an excess of 1,082 spaces. If the proposed replacement project were not built and the existing Simmons school not used, there would still be an excess of 729 pupil spaces.

Appendix IV shows the K-6 capacities and pupil enrollments for elementary schools in planning area 12.

We advised the Superintendent in December 1974 and District officials in January 1975 that because of the availability of spaces in schools in planning area 12, the need for the proposed school was questionable. On March 7, 1975, the District's Office of Budget and Management Systems informed us that the project was removed from DCPS' capital budget request for fiscal year 1976 and that DCPS was requested to prepare a new project justification statement.

Because of changing conditions, particularly because increases in enrollments did not materialize, DCPS again changed its justification for the project. The revised April 4, 1975, statement showed that DCPS reduced the capacity of the proposed replacement school from 738 to 641 pupil spaces, or a reduction of 97 spaces, as follows:

Educational programs	Pupil spaces Before April 1975	After April 1975	Change
Prekindergarten	40	40	-
Kindergarten	52	52	-
Grades 1 through 6	646	301	-345
Grade 7	-	110	110
Day care	-	60	60
Special education	-	78	78
Total	738	641	-97

The reduction in the school seating capacity was made to reflect the future downward trend in elementary school enrollments and to provide space for other educational programs. The seating capacity for grades 1 through 6 was reduced by 345 spaces. DCPS offset this reduction for the most part, however, by adding 248 seating spaces for seventh grade, day care and special education programs. According to DCPS, the added programs--for example, grade 7--require more space than grades 1 through 6 programs. The floor area of the building was not changed.

The project, as changed, was reinstated in the fiscal year 1976 capital budget request but was deleted by the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations. DCPS included the project in its fiscal year 1978 capital budget request, which was still pending before the Congress on July 29, 1977.

The changes do not alter the questionable need for a replacement school. The revised justification statement did not comment on whether excess seats available in other nearby schools could be used to accommodate the expected enrollment of the replacement school. Construction of the facility would result in continued underuse of space in other elementary schools. It would also seem to be contrary to Board of Education policy of replacing a school only when a sizeable seat shortage exists in the area. By not proceeding with the construction of the replacement school, DCPS could reduce its capital improvement costs by about $7.7 million ($8.2 million, less $484,000 already committed). In addition, DCPS could realize savings in operating costs which will be increased by about $44,000 if the school is built.

CHAPTER 3

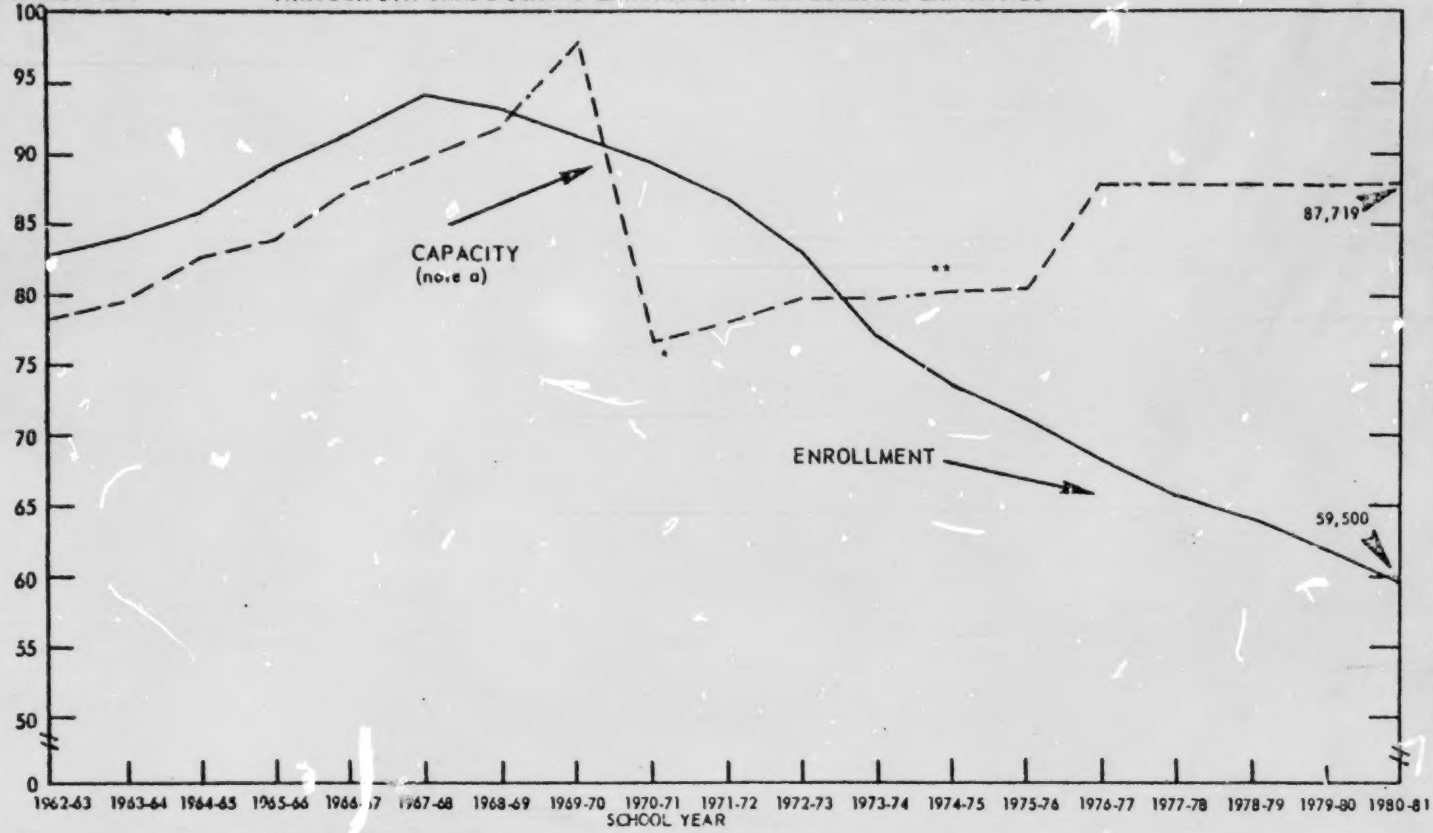
INEFFECTIVE PLANNING FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND MODERNIZATION

The Board of Education needs to implement a capital improvement planning system to help it use its funds more efficiently. This system will provide essential data to enable the Board to effectively plan for the design, construction, or modernization of school buildings. Also, the system would aid the Board in establishing capital facility policies and in carrying out its oversight responsibilities.

An effective planning system should provide for a long-range plan. It should set forth DCPS' goals, educational programs, and the necessary number and type of facilities and seating capacity, considering construction policies, enrollment trends, location, and use and adequacy of existing facilities. Systematic accumulation and reporting of this information should tell the Board when and how much space will be needed, the cost, and whether the space will aid school administration in achieving DCPS' educational goals and programs.

A good planning system could have helped the Board reduce or avoid the accumulation of surplus seating capacity in its elementary schools. DCPS' enrollment forecasts, prepared in January 1977, showed there would be about 19,000 excess seats in elementary schools in school year 1976-77. It also showed declining enrollment and added classrooms will create over 28,000 excess seats by school year 1980-81. This surplus equals about 1,170 classrooms or 47 schools of 600 students each. The following chart shows the widening gap between declining elementary school enrollment and elementary school capacity.

COMPARISON OF ACTUAL AND PROJECTED PREKINDERGARTEN THROUGH 6TH GRADE SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS AND BUILDING CAPACITIES



▲ EXCLUDES 7,858 PUPIL SPACES IN TEMPORARY FACILITIES.
• CAPACITY WAS ADJUSTED WHEN THE AVERAGE CLASS SIZE WAS REDUCED FROM 30:1 TO 24:1.
•• INCLUDES SEATING CAPACITY DELETED BY DCPS FOR INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION. THIS PROGRAM WAS NOT IMPLEMENTED.

The availability of reliable, up-to-date planning information could have alerted the Board that DCPS was adding or replacing seating capacity in one neighborhood when pupil spaces were available in adjacent neighborhoods to meet this need.

DCPS' capital improvement program for 1978-83 will be directed toward modernizing school buildings. The cost of the modernization program is estimated at $102 million. DCPS also plans to develop a prevocational center for handicapped secondary school students and to construct a new elementary school at a combined cost of about $14 million. Thus a critical need still exists for a comprehensive facilities planning system to help school management set priorities and make informed judgments on what course of action should be taken in implementing its proposed modernization program and in making maximum economical use of school facilities. The information generated by an improved planning system would also help management evaluate the need for two new facilities proposed for funding in fiscal years 1979 and 1981.

CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE PLANNING

Vital to school management in meeting its established educational goals is a facilities planning process that systematically accumulates and reports essential information. An effective planning process should provide for:

--Developing a statement of educational goals.

--Accumulating information on educational programs needed to accomplish established goals.

--Describing facilities, equipment, pupil space, and other items required to implement DCPS' approved educational programs.

--Developing demographic data, such as birth rates, migration trends, and housing activity, needed to develop enrollment forecasts and facility requirements.

--Accumulating information on student population projections by school planning areas and for the District of Columbia.

--Accumulating information on capacities and adequacies of existing facilities, including capacity changes that will come about as proposed in the approved capital improvement program.

--Preparing areawide and systemwide analyses of student enrollment and building capacities, including assessing projected building needs.

--Developing and implementing a system to monitor the capital improvement program and its progress toward accommodating DCPS' educational programs and goals.

Data produced from a system that includes these essential elements should help the School Board make informed decisions concerning the location, type, number, and size of school buildings needed to achieve DCPS' educational goals and programs.

In May 1974 the Superintendent of Schools advised the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on District of Columbia that improved educational facilities planning was needed. The Superintendent said that the school system had been remiss in allowing facilities to be built as if they were to be orbited in space, totally unrelated to a specific community with unique needs. The Superintendent said that DCPS must develop a systematic approach for designing, constructing, and using school buildings. In response to questions raised by the Subcommittee Chairman, the Superintendent provided criteria for a facilities planning process. (See app. V.) This included the eight system elements previously set forth and could, if followed, produce a sound approach to planning for needed school construction or modernization.

The Senate Committee on Appropriations in its August 1974 report on the District's appropriation bill for 1975 suggested that $200,000 be reprogramed to develop an adequate capital improvement plan. According to DCPS, this was not done because of internal financial problems and a crippling budget reduction. The DCPS budget request for 1976 included funds to establish a Division of Facilities Planning. The Senate Committee on Appropriations disapproved the request by directing that the Division's activities regarding school closings be continued within the funds made available in fiscal year 1976. DCPS set up a facilities planning group combining educational and technical staff in April 1976.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING PLANNING PROCESS

Need for thorough and reliable data

The Board of Education is responsible for policy decisions, long-range planning, and development of educational

and capital improvement programs under its jurisdiction. The Superintendent of Schools is charged with administering the Board's programs and reporting on DCPS' operations. Included in the Superintendent's responsibilities is the compilation of information needed for developing and justifying DCPS' capital improvement program and budget.

Although information on enrollments, housing activity, facility use, and capacity of schools could have been obtained within DCPS, such information was fragmented and not always up to date. Unless a specific request was made, DCPS had not systematically marshaled or arrayed essential data for school management use. This was not done because the Board had not established requirements for needed data, and DCPS had not implemented procedures spelling out what studies/analyses or summary information were needed to help management in the capital improvement decisionmaking process. If management does not have studies/analyses showing, for instance, what effect an educational program change may have on facility needs of DCPS, it cannot effectively evaluate when, where, how many, and what type of school buildings will be needed to accommodate the change.

DCPS' fiscal year 1976-81 capital improvement plan consisted primarily of a list of projects partially funded and started before fiscal year 1976 and those for which funds would be requested and started during the 6-year period. Provided with the list was a brief narrative statement on school program objectives, information on how DCPS might use older schools, and the emphasis for DCPS' capital improvement during the next 6 fiscal years, such as modernization of secondary facilities. This plan was presented to the Board in October 1975.

Although the plan emphasized the modernization of secondary schools, DCPS did not comment on the effect the decline in student enrollment in elementary schools would have on the junior and senior high school facility needs. Also, the plan did not analyze facility requirements--matching planning area enrollments with capacities--to aid in evaluating whether the proposed modernization of selected elementary and secondary schools was warranted. DCPS had prepared a short-term forecast of elementary and secondary enrollments by planning area in December 1973, but the data was not updated or revised to reflect the elementary schools' seating capacity.

Members of the Board of Education informed us that they did not regularly receive schoolwide information and comparative analyses. For example, they did not have information on

the additional seating capacity to be added to the elementary school system over the next 4 years. If this data had been available to them, together with information on the capacity of existing school buildings and the declining trends in enrollments, they would have been aware of the accumulation of surplus seating capacity in areas of the city where new or replacement schools were in progress or scheduled to get underway. They pointed out that the absence of timely, accurate, complete, and up-to-date information had hindered them in effectively evaluating DCPS' need for some capital projects. As a result, they believe they could not effectively discharge their responsibility of overseeing DCPS' facilities needs.

The Mayor and City Council have the responsibility for establishing the overall amount of capital improvement funds to be allocated to DCPS. Although the Mayor and City Council do not have control over specific projects, they need current and reliable data to evaluate DCPS' overall facility needs. The Capital Improvements Program--Technical Advisory Committee (CIP-TAC), set up by the Mayor's Office, has the primary responsibility for reviewing and evaluating the Board of Education's capital budget and 6-year capital improvement plan.

According to CIP-TAC representatives, the Committee could not make an informed evaluation of capital improvement projects included in DCPS' plan because the information DCPS supplied to support the proposed projects was not sufficient to make a detailed evaluation of DCPS' needs. The representatives said that before CIP-TAC could make an informed evaluation of the proposed modernization program and the continued need for projects previously approved, CIP-TAC had to request vital information from DCPS. This included pupil population projections by school planning area, information on the impact DCPS' career development education program would have on the secondary school facility needs, and an analysis showing the effect on elementary and secondary schools of changing the grade combinations in junior high schools. Such data should have been developed as part of the facilities planning process and made a part of the capital improvement plan.

Lack of Board policy guidance

According to the Board of Education rules, the Board will clearly delineate policy for school administration. Policies having an immediate or long-term effect on facilities planning must be clearly defined and disseminated to insure that educational goals are achieved and school buildings are designed, constructed, and modernized in accordance with Board policy.

Members and staff of the Board of Education advised us that policy statements relating to the capital improvements program--such as planning and review of capital projects, facility design and use, and replacement versus modernization of facilities--had not been codified by the Board. Furthermore, we were advised that Board policy was communicated informally to the Superintendent. Thus it was not known what policy statements existed nor which had been submitted to the Superintendent.

Discussions with the Superintendent and representatives of the Board and DCPS during school year 1974-75 indicated that they disagreed on whether certain policies ex[illegible]. For example, the Superintendent advised us that the Board of Education had a stated policy of providing a program for pupils in the 3 to 21 age group. The Superintendent indicated that the extremes of this age range were largely unserved at the present time. A staff member of the Board of Education informed us that the Board did not have a stated policy of providing a program for the 3 to 21 age group. Because of the impact such a Board policy could have on DCPS' resources--people, money, and assets--and particularly on facilities planning, it is extremely important that Board policies be delineated and clearly communicated to the Superintendent of Schools.

Education program requirements not considered

A major function of the facilities planning process is to achieve effective coordination between DCPS' educational staff and the facilities planning staff. To insure that buildings will be able to accommodate educational programs, the educational staff must clearly delineate its programs and make this information available to the facilities planning staff. During the fiscal year 1975 appropriations hearings before the Subcommittee on District of Columbia, House Committee on Appropriations, the Deputy Superintendent of Schools commented as follows:

> "What we are after is also getting the programs, new programs that would be planned by educational personnel to feed to a technical facility planning staff for the actual facility planning and design. What we want to do is get away from building buildings first and then adapting the educational program to the building. We want to reverse this and have the program planning and the technical end being planned at the same time."

We talked with a representative of the DCPS Division of Building and Grounds, which is responsible for developing the capital improvement program. He informed us that DCPS' 1976-81 capital improvement program, prepared after the testimony, did not reflect the Superintendent's prekindergarten through 12th grade (PK-12) program because the Division had not received any guidance from the Superintendent or Board of Education on how this educational program should be implemented.

The District's public schools are divided into three major categories: elementary--PK-6; junior high schools--grades 7-9; and senior high schools--grades 10-12. We were advised, however, that DCPS planned to change these groupings and that school facilities may accommodate other grade combinations, such as PK-9, PK-12, or 4-12.

According to DCPS personnel, the shift to different grade combinations in the school facilities will require varying degrees of modification to the structure. For example, they believe that modification would be more extensive in an elementary school if grades 7 through 9 were added than it would be if the six lower grades were added to an existing junior high. Until guidelines are established as to how and when this program should be implemented and made part of the facilities planning process, DCPS' long-term facility needs cannot be adequately determined.

In commenting on the draft report, the Mayor said that DCPS, as part of its planning, has moved to consider the use of space in a total availability context. He said that the use of elementary space for grades 7 through 9 will help the still tight capacity-enrollment situation at the junior high level.

Inflexible application of neighborhood concept

Basic to DCPS' plan for constructing or modernizing school buildings is its concept of a neighborhood school, having sufficient facilities in a neighborhood to provide quality education and to enable the students to walk to school. To facilitate the planning process and adhere to this concept, DCPS established 26 planning areas within the District of Columbia. These planning areas are to be self-sufficient in terms of pupil seating capacity, and schools in the planning area are to serve only residents in that area. In applying this concept in its capital improvement program, DCPS considered it more important to plan for school facility needs on the basis of a particular area rather than

the entire system. As a result, it did not consider any differences between enrollments and capacities in other planning areas in determining the facility needs of an individual planning area.

Also, in developing its construction program, DCPS stressed the importance of building and modernizing school plants and having the flexibility of being able to close out old and obsolete school facilities if and when the projected decline in student enrollments materialized.

DCPS officials have said, and the project justifications have shown, that DCPS did not consider the available seating capacities of other planning areas when it determined the need for a new, replacement, or modernization project in a planning area. In chapter 2 we show that DCPS can avoid constructing a replacement school (Perry-Simmons) if it takes advantage of the available excess seating capacity.

We do not disagree with DCPS' plan to have schools within close proximity of a student's residence. But to rigidly adhere to a concept that apparently discourages the use of seating capacity available in nearby schools outside of the planning area, or that could be made available by realigning school boundaries, could result in inefficient use of school buildings and unnecessary expenditure of capital funds.

If DCPS continues to use planning areas to determine its facility needs, it should consider the use of available excess seating capacity in adjacent planning areas. The facilities planning system should include procedures for evaluating the number of pupil spaces and how these spaces could be used.

Need for a monitoring system

DCPS recognizes that conditions are not always static and that project needs or priorities could be altered if conditions change, particularly when the construction timetable slips. It is also aware that the time lapse between the conception of a capital improvement project and the award of a construction contract has several times exceeded 8 years.

Yet, the Board of Education had not established a policy requiring a periodic evaluation of need, nor had DCPS adopted a procedure of routinely reevaluating the need for a project at regular intervals. The elementary schools have, or will have, excess seating capacity that could have been reduced or avoided if DCPS had routinely evaluated its long-term

building capacity requirements to determine, before construction, whether a need continued to exist for approved projects. The following example illustrates the need for periodic evaluation.

DCPS, in requesting construction funds in fiscal year 1971 for the Morgan Elementary School replacement--located within planning area 3 or the northwest area of the city (see map, p. 7.)--predicted that the 1970-71 pupil enrollment in this planning area would increase from 6,340 to 7,195 by school year 1975-76. At the time the construction contract was awarded in May 1972, however, the enrollment had decreased by 160 students. Enrollment in planning area 3 continued to decline, and by 1975-76 it had dropped to 5,225 instead of the forecasted 7,195.

The pupil capacity of the existing Morgan school is 578, but the new replacement, scheduled for completion in 1977, will have a PK-6 capacity of 1,119, an increase of 541 pupil spaces. PK-6 enrollment at the Morgan school in 1976-77 was 398. Use of the new replacement school could drop below 36 percent if the enrollment continues to drop in planning area 3.

Although student enrollment in planning area 3 did not take a sharp drop until after the construction contract was awarded, elementary school enrollment in the District had been declining since school year 1967-68. Periodic project evaluation could have alerted DCPS that the planned increase of 541 pupil spaces may not have been needed.

Although DCPS did not have an established procedure for making periodic evaluations of planned construction projects, we were advised that evaluations had been made which resulted in reducing the capacity of planned facilities. These evaluations were not done as part of DCPS' review process, however, but on request by other District and Federal agencies. Further, we noted that although pupil seating capacity was reduced, DCPS' evaluations did not provide a complete analysis of whether capacities should be reduced further or whether the project should be eliminated from the construction program.

For example, DCPS' evaluation of the Perry-Simmons project in April 1975 showed that the replacement school was needed to handle the enrollment expected in the planning area being served by the school. The evaluation did not consider excess seating capacity that was available in other schools in close proximity to the proposed project. If DCPS considered

and used this available capacity, the planned project could be eliminated from the construction program. This project is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

IS THERE A NEED FOR FUTURE PLANNING?

Yes. Sound planning must take place if DCPS is to effectively and efficiently use its schools. DCPS' concern has shifted from constructing additonal seating capacity to modernizing its existing elementary, secondary, and vocational schools. The estimated cost of the proposed modernization during the period 1978-83 will be about $102 million. School management will not, however, be able to effectively address this program until it develops a facilities planning process which produces reliable and essential data needed for informed decisionmaking.

To help DCPS management set priorities and develop the scope of its long-term planning, DCPS would need answers to questions such as those raised by CIP-TAC and the Congress. For example:

--Should special education students be placed in regular elementary schools, or should the existing special education schools be modernized or replaced?

--What effect will the anticipated decline in secondary high school enrollment have on facility needs?

--What would be the impact on facility needs if junior high schools were phased out as separate learning institutions and these facilities were redirected to PK-9, PK-12, or 4-12 systems?

Unless information is developed to address these questions, management will not be able to effectively decide which schools can be efficiently modernized or converted to other uses. The information is also essential to management in deciding whether schools should be closed or changes made in planning area boundaries to best use their facilities.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AGENCY COMMENTS

CONCLUSIONS

Construction of Perry-Simmons school

Opportunities exist for DCPS to reduce its capital improvement costs by about $7.7 million, excluding the funds previously authorized for site and construction services, by not proceeding with the construction of the proposed Perry-Simmons replacement school. Sufficient seating capacity is available in school buildings in the vicinity of the existing school to accommodate the expected elementary school enrollment of the replacement school. Also, construction of the school would seem to be contrary to Board policy of building a school only when a sizeable seat shortage exists in the area.

The use of other school facilities with available seating capacity to accommodate the pupils scheduled to attend the replacement school will result in better use of existing facilities. Use of existing facilities would not require pupils to walk farther to school than pupils in other areas of the city.

In addition to the savings in capital improvement costs, DCPS would also achieve savings in its operating costs. DCPS estimates that its annual operating costs will increase by about $44,000 if the Perry-Simmons replacement school is constructed.

Capital facilities planning

The administration of DCPS' capital improvement program needs management attention. The problems concerning this program stem primarily from the absence of an effective facilities planning system. A well-defined and well-implemented planning system could have helped the Board of Education reduce or possibly avoid the accumulation of surplus seating capacity in its elementary schools. It would also contribute greatly to giving school officials the information needed for effectively managing the capital improvement program and would help District officials and the Congress in carrying out their budgeting overview responsibilities.

The need for an effective facilities planning system is of extreme importance now because of DCPS' plans to spend over $116 million ($102 million for school modernization and

$14 million for construction of an elementary school and development of a prevocational center for handicapped pupils) for capital improvements during the next 6 years and because DCPS' management must decide what course of action it should take to insure that the seating capacity in schools is efficiently and effectively used. Early implementation of a planning system would be enhanced if the Board delineated its policy on capital improvements. Also, Board policy must be communicated to and implemented by the Superintendent of Schools and monitored by the Superintendent and the Board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Board of Education:

--Cancel its plan to build the Perry-Simmons replacement school.

--Implement a facilitites planning system that provides for the accumulation and reporting of essential data to assist in evaluating its school building needs. (See app. V.)

--Revise its planning policy to consider the schools' available pupil capacity in adjacent planning areas rather than only that of a specified area in determining its space needs.

--Codify its policy statements on capital improvements and formally submit them to the Superintendent of Schools.

--Develop and adopt a plan and timetable for implementing the planning system.

AGENCY COMMENTS

Mayor

The Mayor, in a letter dated December 28, 1976, said the report's results had been used informally over the past months to assist the District with the problems discussed in the report. He said the study benefited the District in pointing out the need for reexamination of the planned replacement schools included in the draft report. He said the report will also be useful in the planning efforts of the Board of Education and its recently established capital

facilities planning staff. The Mayor pointed out that during the period of our study the District had also been considering the need for educational facilities planning and closer examination of enrollment versus capacity information in determining the continued use of educational facilities. He said that the report would be a useful tool in the ongoing efforts to make the most intelligent use of space.

The Mayor said that DCPS, as part of its planning, has moved to consider the use of space in a total availability context. He said that the use of elementary space for grades 7 through 9 will help deal with the still tight capacity-enrollment situation at the junior high level.

DCPS' efforts to make better use of its available elementary school seating capacity is in line with our recommendations.

Board of Education

We forwarded a draft of our report to the Board of Education for comment on October 15, 1976. The President of the Board of Education, in a letter dated March 1, 1977, said that the Board found it difficult to comment on our report because the information was considerably out of date. He added that since the Board's testimony before the Subcommittee on District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Appropriations, addressed most of the particular issues raised in our report, the Board chose not to respond and referred us to the appropriation hearings on its capital budget. (Fiscal years 1976 and 1977 appropriation hearings were held in January and April 1976, respectively.) He said that it was apparent to the Board that its testimony before the Subcommittee was satisfactory to the Congress since the projects questioned in our report were subsequently approved by both Houses of the Congress.

The data in this report has been updated somewhat by using information contained in the District's 1978-83 capital improvements program released in September 1976, and DCPS' enrollment report and forecast dated November 1976 and January 1977, respectively. Although the new data changed some of the figures, the modifications did not affect our position or change our recommendations.

We disagree with the Board's position that the two projects (Burrville and Perry-Simmons) questioned in our draft report were specifically approved by the Congress in the fiscal year 1976 budget. Site and construction funds were

authorized for the Burrville replacement project in prior fiscal years rather than in 1976 as indicated by the Board. The Senate and House Committees on Appropriations provided authorization for the District to borrow only $100,000 for equipment for this project in fiscal year 1976.

In October 1976 when we sent the draft to the Board for comment, the data presented showed that this school was not needed. In March 1977, however, the construction contract was awarded. Because of this action, we deleted discussion of the project from this report.

The District's authority to borrow funds to acquire a site and start the design of the other replacement school--Perry-Simmons--was indicated in the House and Senate Committee reports for fiscal year 1974. For fiscal year 1976, the year referred to by the Board, DCPS requested $7.5 million for the Perry-Simmons replacement school with a pupil capacity of 641. The request was deleted from the budget by the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations. DCPS included the project again in its fiscal year 1978 capital budget request, still pending before the Congress on July 29, 1977.

In its 1976 testimony on the need for the Perry-Simmons replacement school, DCPS said that it was determined at community meetings that the school was required because of the number of children from the expected 400 housing units to be built in NW #1 and because of a change in the school's capacity to reflect other educational programs, such as day care, special education, and seventh grade.

DCPS, in its 1974 budget request, expected the enrollment in NW #1 to increase from 1,276 to 1,849 by school year 1978-79, an increase of 57%. In August 1976, 6 months after the fiscal year 1976 appropriation hearings, DCPS made new enrollment estimates. These estimates showed that the PK-6 enrollment in NW #1 would be between 1,513 and 1,580 in school year 1979-80, a decrease of as much as 336 over the 1974 budget estimate. (These estimates include pupils from outside the boundaries of NW #1--at least 280 pupils in school year 1979-80.) Considering only the estimated enrollment and capacity of elementary schools in NW #1, the replacement school would be needed. Excess pupil spaces exist in other nearby schools outside the boundaries of NW #1, however, which, if used, would eliminate the need for the replacement school.

The DCPS responses in the fiscal year 1976 Senate appropriations hearings to issues raised in our report are as follows.

Capital improvement planning process

"* * * The Board clearly recognizes the critical need for facilities planning, and is making every effort to assign the highest priority to this function. * * *

"* * * A general cost effectiveness study of the current plant inventory is already underway, and a tack force has been established and is in operation which will develop total criteria for the analysis of program needs and effectiveness criteria for all buildings under Public Schools jurisdiction, as an integral part of the facilities planning program now being organized within the Public Schools.

"The request for * * * money was made as a part of this attempt to do a more effective job of planning for capital construction. * * *"

Empty pupil spaces in elementary schools

"* * * the projection of 30,000 excess spaces presumes that the entire building inventory would be retained into school year 1979-80. Such is not the intention of the Board of Education. Many of the pupil stations currently in our inventory are totally unsatisfactorily [sic], and will be abandoned with the availability of new and far more adequate space. In some other cases, the modernization of facilities will reduce the designated number of stations by converting the total space into more adequate pupil stations. * * *

"* * * Until the facilities planning program proposed for the Public Schools is well underway, and a comprehensive analysis of all buildings in the inventory has been undertaken, it is not possible to designate particular actions to be taken with regard to particular school facilities. We can only say at the present time that the Board of Education intends to

make the maximum economical use of school facilities available. Such maximum use would include the use of some more adequate space projected to become available to house Special Education programs new [sic] located in grossly inadequate facilities, the use of available school space for school offices and perhaps other city functions now inadequately housed * * * and the phasing out of old and excessively expensive buildings * * *."

Phasing out policy in schools

"* * * The Acting Superintendent of Schools recently named a panel * * * to: (1) develop a proposed policy statement on the phasing out of undercapaciated [sic] schools; (2) develop a proposed policy statement on the maintenance of undercapaciated [sic] schools under certain specific conditions; and (3) develop proposed criteria for determining the future use or disposition of phased-out educational facilities. * * *

Moratorium on future construction

"* * * While we agree that the requirement for comprehensive facilities planning is critical to the future capital improvement and construction program of the Public Schools, we cannot concur in a total moratorium, since there are several serious problems and requirements which cannot depend exclusively upon development of a facilities planning unit. * * *

"* * * Public Schools is attemping--within currently available resources--to develop some criteria for the general facilities planning program we hope to institute. * * *

"* * * The Superintendent has formed a community and professional committee to develop specific criteria upon which to make judgements concerning the closing of certain school buildings within the District, and the future requirements for modernization and replacement among those school buildings remaining in the inventory. * * *"

PK-12 program

"* * * The Pre-K through Grade 12 program has not been adopted as a systemwide organizational pattern. This Administration feels that each local community must have an opportunity to review, evaluate, and determine alternative educational programs. As this process is undertaken, the utilization of facilities will be determined.

"An active Facilities Planning Unit, as requested in the current budget, would be able to provide the necessary support to guide communities in the most economical and educationally effective utilization of established facilities.

"Only as individual programs are developed and adequate study undertaken as to facility need can such determinations be made.

"This Administration feels that it is vital to have an active Facilities Planning Unit capable of determining the best educational and economical use of resources. * * *" (Underscoring added.)

The DCPS testimony before the Senate Subcommittee during its fiscal year 1976 budget hearings clearly pointed out the need for a facilities planning system that can produce reliable and essential data needed to effectively evaluate when, where, and how many schools are needed in the District's public school system. The testimony also showed that DCPS has initiated action to develop essential data, policy statements, and criteria needed for informed decisionmaking.

During hearings on the fiscal year 1977 budget request before the Subcommittee on District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Appropriations, the Superintendent of Schools said that DCPS had developed and submitted to the Board of Education a set of proposed criteria to be used in determining buildings to be maintained or removed from the inventory. He stated that once the Board has approved the proposed criteria, DCPS will identify the schools to be phased out or closed. The time frame for eliminating obsolete facilities, however, has not been established

The Superintendent further stated:

In fiscal year 1976, we have requested the beginning elements of a facilities planning

unit, and we hope with this base to reorganize much of our planning organization into a truly productive facilities planning unit which will deal with all aspects of educational planning and the facilities and materials required to meet those plans."

The DCPS testimony did not specifically cover our recommendations concerning codification of the Board's policy statements on capital improvements, use of total available space in determining space needs for a specific area, and the development of a plan and timetable for implementing the facilities planning system.

Comments by the Mayor and DCPS taken collectively, however, indicate that action is being taken to improve the planning for school facilities. To insure that needed changes are made, a definite plan should be developed and a timetable set for completing the necessary actions. Also, the Board's capital improvement policy statements should be codified and submitted to the Superintendent of Schools, and its policy on determining space needs for specific areas should be revised.

Our response to specific questions that were not discussed in the report narrative but were raised by the Board in its attachment, "Comments: GAO Draft Report on the District of Columbia Public Schools' Capital Improvement Program," is included in appendix III.

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WALTER E. WASHINGTON
MAYOR

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20004

DEC 28 1976

Mr. Victor Lowe, Director
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Lowe:

My staff has reviewed the draft Report on the District of Columbia Public School's Capital Improvements Program. I would point out that the City during the period of the study has been actively on its own considering the need for educational facilities planning and closer examination of enrollment versus capacity information in determining continued use of educational facilities.

The study was most beneficial to the City in indicating the need for reexamination of the Burrville and Perry-Simmons Elementary Schools. It should be noted that the sharp examination given to both projects by the Board of Education, the community, the Executive and Legislative Branches of the City Government, and the Congress was unprecedented.

The District's Public Schools have recently established a capital facilities planning staff. I am sure your report will be useful to this staff and the Board of Education in their planning efforts. I am also sure your report will be a useful tool in the City's on-going efforts to make the most intelligent use of space available in this period of austerity.

There are some specifics that I would suggest you consider:

1. It would help understanding of the report if it were stated that the essential data collection was completed about 15 months ago and the report's results have been used informally over the past months as part of the GAO's efforts to assist the District on the problems discussed in the report.

2. It should be stated - again to aid understanding - that the Public Schools have moved as part of their planning to consider use of space in a total availability context. This is important in that the study considers only the use of elementary space as you note; however, one of the solutions to understanding is the use of elementary space for Grades 7, 8 and 9. This, of course, helps deal with the still tight capacity-enrollment situation at the junior high level.

[See GAO note.]

I am pleased that the City has been given the opportunity to comment on your report and I hope the comments here will be useful in preparing your final report.

Sincerely,

Walter E. Washington
Mayor

GAO note: These portions were deleted because material related to these comments has been deleted or reworded in the final report.

APPENDIX II

BOARD OF EDUCATION
OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THERMAN E. EVANS
PRESIDENT

CAROL L. SCHWARTZ
VICE PRESIDENT

BETTYE G. BENJAMIN JULIUS W. HOBSON, JR. ELIZABETH C. KANE HILDA HOWLAND M. MASON
BARBARA LETT SIMMONS CONRAD P. SMITH WILLIAM W. TREANOR JOHN E. WARREN MINNIE B. WOODSON

March 1, 1977

Mr. Frank Medico
Assistant Director
General Government Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Medico:

We have received and reviewed your draft report on the capital construction program of the D.C. Public Schools, and your request that we comment on the report.

In general, the Board of Education finds it most difficult to comment on this report, since the information in the report is considerably out of date. In addition, most of this material was--we understand--transmitted to the Congress during the recent hearings on our capital budget, and as a result we were required to respond to it before the Senate Subcommittee. It is apparent to us that our responses to the Committee were satisfactory to Congress, since the projects called into question by your report were subsequently approved by both Houses of Congress and made a part of our current capital construction budget.

In this report, we appear to be required again to respond. We would prefer to refer you to our testimony before the Senate Subcommittee, since that testimony addressed most of the particular issues raised in your report with regard to individual construction projects.

In addition, we would also wish to draw your attention to the attachment, "Comments: GAO Draft Report on the District of Columbia Public Schools' Capital Improvement Program" which presents an analysis of certain items in your draft with which we wish to take exception or on which we would wish to comment.

Sincerely,

Therman E. Evans

Therman E. Evans, M.D.
President

Attachment

DWIGHT B. CROPP
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

PRESIDENTIAL BUILDING
415 12TH STREET N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004
202 724-4368

DAVID A. SPLITT
GENERAL COUNSEL

BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENTS ON OUR DRAFT REPORT ON DCPS' CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM AND OUR REPLY

EXCESS SPACE

Board comment

> "The report comments on the availability of excess spaces, but does not speak to the quality of those spaces which, in many instances, is not adequate. The removal of these old buildings from the inventory does not obviate the need for construction of new space."

Our reply

DCPS, in its testimony during the fiscal year 1976 appropriation hearings, said that until a comprehensive analysis of all buildings in the inventory has been undertaken, it is not possible to say what actions will be taken on particular school facilities.

We estimated that by 1981 DCPS will have 28,000 excess seats in elementary schools, or the equivalent of 47 schools of 600 students each. Many of its schools, including some in planning area 12, were constructed or modernized since 1970. The total excess space may be altered because some of it may not be "adequate." We do not believe it is reasonable to conclude, however, that 47 schools will be closed because the quality of the space is not "adequate."

NEIGHBORHOOD USE

Board comment

> "Neighborhood needs as a criterion in deciding on school space is not noted in the digest. In discussing the Perry-Simmons on page 15, the planning area which includes the school is included but the peculiar downtown nature, traffic/business patterns of the area is not described. The digest should consider neighborhood descriptors along with enrollment statistics as factors in school space decisions."

Our reply

The downtown nature and traffic/business patterns of the area could be a factor in deciding on school space needs.

We did not discuss this matter because the project justifications presented by the Board to the Congress do not address this point.

EVALUATION

Board comment

"The statement 'Public Schools management does not routinely evaluate the continued need for projects' is incorrect. The capital construction program is evaluated annually in two ways:

"a. the annual review of boundaries by the boundary committee, and

"b. the general review of the capital outlay budget as it is submitted each year, including the current year and the out-years."

Our reply

Guidelines for annual boundary reviews indicate that the review will be directed primarily toward using existing space and new construction space to be completed during the year of the review. The guidelines are not directed toward determining whether space to be provided by new construction, approved but not underway, should be completed. Our review of DCPS' capital improvements program showed that the Board of Education had not established a policy requiring a periodic evaluation of need and that DCPS had not adopted a procedure of routinely evaluating the need for an approved project at regular intervals.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Board comment

"Neither the digest nor the report speaks to the political implications of the decision-making involved in opening or closing buildings. The politics of community involvement should be added to the questions on page iv."

Our reply

The questions cited in the draft illustrated the information needed by the Board to help it make decisions on the use of excess school space and modernization of school buildings. We encourage the Board to add other pertinent questions,

particularly if they produce information needed for decision-making.

FACILITIES PLANNING SUPPORT

Board comment

> "The digest does not indicate the failure of Congress to fund the request for facilities planning in two consecutive years, although this is noted in the body of the report itself. This failure of Congress to fund this activity should be mentioned in the digest, since it indicates the priority which Congress itself attached to this activity."

Our reply

The matter of funding for facilities planning has been included in the digest.

Board comment

> "The critical need for facilities planning is repeated but a discussion of the relationship of this critical need to the Congressional perception of its priority is ommited."

Our reply

The congressional perception of the priority placed on developing an adequate capital improvement plan or establishing a facilities planning division is shown on page 13 of our report.

Board comment

> "The history of this request is descrited. It is critical that the GAO comment on the apparent priority which this history suggests, and make a recommendation to the Congress on the basis of the disparity in priorities."

Our reply

We did not make an analysis of the DCPS personnel staffing levels or the funds allocated for its various operating programs. We are therefore not in a position to recommend to the Congress what, if any, additional personnel and funds would be required to develop and implement a facilities

planning system or whether this activity could be accomplished within the present staffing and funding levels of DCPS.

Board comment

"The D.C. Public Schools have, with great difficulty, established a facilities planning office without needed Congressional support. GAO should recognize this effort as well as the intent of the office which is established outside of Management Services as a joint office combining educational and techninal staff."

Our reply

Our report (p. 13) shows that DCPS has established a facilities planning group without approval of additional funds.

FUNDING

Board comment

"Three statements are made that are either incorrect or suggest that the basic method for funding in the City is not understood.

"The statement 'DCPS' operations are financed primarily by annual appropriations from the Congress and by grants from federal agencies' suggest [sic] that Congressional funds are used.

"It is important that this sentence be revised to indicate that the DCPS operation is financed almost exclusively from local taxes, and not federal funds.

'The Board is vested with final authority in determining what capital improvement projects should be included in its capital outlay budget.'

"The Mayor and City Council have the authority to delete projects, and have exercised that authority.

'The Congress appropriated approximately $338 million for these projects through FY 1975.'

"This must be changed to indicate that the Congress approved borrowing authority for the City at this level, but did not appropriate any funds."

Our reply

Our report has been revised to state that DCPS operations are financed mostly from District revenues.

According to the District's Corporation Counsel, the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia may establish a ceiling on the total amount of funds available for educational purposes, but neither is authorized to dictate to the Board what specific projects should be included in or excluded from the budget of the public schools.

Our report has been revised to show that borrowing authority was approved.

CAPACITY

Board comment

> "The report indicates that the need for replacement of Burrville is questionable 'on the basis of pupil capacity.' It should be noted that this was taken into consideration in the most recent presentation to Congress. The Board of Education took the position that pupil capacity was not necessary as the justification for this replacement, and proposed several other justifications, which were accepted by the Congress."

Our reply

Material concerning Burrville has been deleted from the final report.

BOUNDARIES

Board comment

> "The report recommends that attendance boundaries be realigned. It should be noted that such realignment takes place each year as a matter of rountine procedure."

Our reply

We do not disagree that school attendance boundaries are realigned each year. Our review of selected proposed projects indicated, however, that DCPS did not consider available space in nearby schools in determing the need

for a project. Use of excess spaces in other schools could require the realignment of school attendance or planning area boundaries.

CITY PLANNING

Board comment

> "In discussing the need for Perry-Simmons, there is no indication that much of the problem of planning for this particular school includes the failure of the total planning process for this entire area of the City. It has been extremely difficult to determine the areas approximate to this school which will be residential, and the type of residential areas to be built. This broader problem should be included in the GAO report."

Our reply

This problem was not included in the DCPS budget justifications to the Congress. We agree that this could influence planning. However, since the data used by DCPS to support its request for funds did not discuss this problem, an evaluation of the extent of the influence cannot be determined.

Board comment

> "As noted in the comments on the digest, the report discusses the planning area which includes the Perry-Simmons School, but does not describe the peculiar downtown nature of this area. The traffic/business pattern in the area is another factor which must be considered along with total enrollment statistics, and which would severely modify the 'one-mile radius' purported policy."

Our reply

See our reply to the Board's comment on neighborhood use on pages 32 and 33.

EXCESS SPACE AND NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

Board comment

> "The GAO report appears to be concerned with the boundaries of the planning areas. Reference

is made, at the bottom of the page, to nearby schools and realigning school boundaries. Very often, the available excess seats are not adjacent to the planning areas requiring construction. What is GAO's comment on this circumstance, when the excess seats appear in far Northwest, but the building to be replaced is in far Southeast?"

Our reply

We recognize that excess seating capacity may not always be available in adjacent schools or planning areas, but that should not preclude the Board from revising its policy to consider the available seating capacity of schools in the adjacent areas.

FUNDING PROCESS

Board comment

"The periodic evaluation of needs, in which we would generally concur, appears to conflict with the new procedure for funding capital projects. In the past, only portions of the requirements were proposed in each year's budget, and there was therefore an opportunity to review the need at each state [sic] in the development of the project. The current policy calls for a total funding of the project at a single point in time, and this would appear to conflict with the recommendation of GAO. Is GAO recommending to Congress that the newly established procedure be abandoned?"

Our reply

Although the funding may now occur at a single point in time, the various phases--preliminary survey, site acquisition, project design, and construction--of a capital improvement project would, as in the past, occur over a span of several years. Therefore, DCPS would still be afforded an opportunity to evaluate the need at various points in time, such as after the completion of the preliminary survey, site acquisition, or project design phases. A decision to continue or discontinue a project can be made at various points in time irrespective of whether the funds are available for the entire project.

GAO note: Page number references in this appendix may not correspond to pages of this report.

SCHOOL-YEAR COMPARISON OF ACTUAL AND PROJECTED ENROLLMENTS AND CAPACITIES, K-6, PLANNING AREA 12 (NOTE A)

Elementary school	Actual									Projected					
	1974-75			1975-76			1976-77			1977-78			1978-79		
	Capacity	Enrollment	Excess	Capacity	Enrollment	Excess	Capacity	Enrollment	Excess	Capacity	Enrollment	Excess	Capacity	Enrollment	Excess
Bundy (note b)	424	241	183	424	230	194	(c)	-	-	-					
Cleveland (note d)	410	254	156	410	267	143	410	254	156	410			410		
Cook, J. P. (note b)	410	318	92	410	294	116	410	271	139	410			410		
Garrison	800	693	107	800	631	169	800	550	250	800			800		
Grimke	506	274	232	506	254	252	506	201	305	506			506		
Langston (note b)	194	188	6	194	163	31	194	(e)	194	194			194		
Montgomery (note b)	410	435	-25	410	407	3	824	611	213	824			824		
Seaton (note d)	704	583	121	704	586	118	704	558	146	704			704		
Simmons (note f)	604	529	75	604	513	91	604	469	135	604			g/353		
Slater (note b)	192	170	22	192	140	52	192	241	-49	192			192		
Thomson (note d)	434	383	51	434	382	52	434	374	60	434			434		
Walker-Jones (notes b and f)	494	438	-24	920	573	347	920	516	404	920	-----	-----	920	-----	-----
Total	5,692	4,496	996	6,008	4,440	1,568	5,998	4,045	1,953	5,998	h/4,263	1,735	5,747	4,665	1,082

a/Enrollment/capacity figures exclude prekindergarten, since projections were not available. In 1975 the prekindergarten enrollment in planning area 12 was 191. Planning area 12 schools will have 160 prekindergarten spaces when the capital projects are completed.

b/Elementary schools within a 1/2-mile radius of Simmons.

c/Bundy was converted to a special education facility in September 1976 and has an enrollment of 72. The capacity is 424.

d/Elementary schools within 1-mile radius of Simmons.

e/Enrollment at Langston Elementary School was combined with Slater's.

f/Elementary schools located in NW #1 urban renewal area.

g/Excludes capacity allocated for seventh graders (110 spaces), prekindergarten (140 spaces), day care (60 spaces), and special education (70 spaces).

h/DCPS forecasts by planning area only.

APPENDIX IV

DCPS CRITERIA FOR A FACILITIES PLANNING PROGRAM

The DCPS facilities planning process proceeds on the basic assumption that the effective planning, completion, and evaluation of District educational facilities must be based on identified requirements of educational and technical staff and that these specified requirements will be met within the resulting facility.

The major functions of the facilities planning process, which must create the framework within which effective educational facilities are designed, constructed, and put into use, are to provide the procedures:

--Through which the elements of an educational program for a particular situation are communicated to the facilities planning division, which determines the technical implications of accommodating a planned program.

--Through which educational staff can delineate the educational program to be accommodated in a facility.

--For interaction so that proposed educational programs and related facility designs may be evaluated by educational research and facilities planning staff.

--Through which technical analysis of the physical properties can be evaluated to accommodate the described educational programs.

--For transmitting accumulated city demographic data, school population studies information, and up-to-date facilities design and equipment standards.

As a result of these functions:

--New facilities will be built to accommodate anticipated educational programs.

--Buildings will be designed, constructed, and rehabilitated on the basis of requirements for proposed educational programs.

--The school system's short-range goals can be met while simultaneously working toward the system's long-range goals.

To implement the facilities planning process:

--An educational component will be established within the Office of Educational Programs and Services.

--A Facilities Planning Division will be established in the Office of Management Services.

--Staff will be designated within the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation.

The facilities planning process relies on the systematic interaction of all of the above components and depends upon appropriate participants' development and presentation of, and response to, the information required for completing a particular project. To carry out these responsibilities, the educational component is required to provide an educational program outline explaining the details of the educational program for which a new facility is to be developed.

The Division of Facilities Planning will review the educational specifications and detail the physical implications for accommodating the proposed educational program in a new redesigned facility.

The staff of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation will:

--Interact with educational staff and facilities planning staff at each step of the planning process.

--Participate in facilities planning process decisions to insure compatability with the school system's educational goals.

--Participate in revisions of the facilities planning process decisions, as determined by the results of the joint assessments of proposed and planned facilities.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT CONCERNED WITH ACTIVITIES DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

	Tenure of office	
	From	To
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF EDUCATION:		
Therman E. Evans	Jan. 1976	Present
Virginia Morris	July 1974	Jan. 1976
Marion Barry, Jr.	Jan. 1972	July 1974
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS:		
Vincent E. Reed	Mar. 1976	Present
Vincent E. Reed (acting)	Oct. 1975	Mar. 1976
Barbara A. Sizemore	Oct. 1973	Oct. 1975
Hugh J. Scott	Oct. 1970	Sept. 1973
DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT, MANAGEMENT SERVICES:		
Edward G. Winner	Apr. 1976	Present
Edward G. Winner (acting)	Oct. 1975	Apr. 1976
James L. Williams	Jan. 1974	Oct. 1975
William J. Bedford (acting)	Sept. 1972	Dec. 1973
ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT, PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION:		
Vacant	Aug. 1975	Present
James Johnson	Jan. 1974	Aug. 1975
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, RESEARCH AND PLANNING:		
Mildred P. Cooper	Nov. 1970	Present

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